

## **CHRONIC WASTING DISEASE UPDATE**

### **September 13, 2002**

Testimony of a former deer hauler who has turned states evidence in an investigation of the illegal movement of cervids has reveled some disturbing information. This informant had hauled numerous loads of illegal deer and elk that were shipped to various states by brokers working out of Michigan. These deer and elk were unmarked and untested and are valuable to hunters due to the fact that any animal that shows signs of captivity cannot be entered into most record books. Hunts behind high wire for trophy size animals go for between \$40,000 and \$50,000, making it a high profit business.

The majority of the deer moved by the informant were free-ranging deer caught in Ontario and brought into the U.S. at a border crossing in Montana where the guards did not check closely. The animals were moved at night to prevent law enforcement checks and keep the animals cool. Major destination states were Texas, Pennsylvania, Missouri and Mississippi. Two sets of papers were carried by the driver, one for law enforcement and one for the rancher receiving the animals. Veterinarians were paid to falsify the papers to get the shipments through the borders. Information provided by the informant indicates that approximately 25,000 illegal deer a month are shipped in the United States.

The Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) has approved a buy-out plan submitted by the Nebraska Department of Agriculture. This plan will permit the buy-out of any captive cervid producer in the Nebraska endemic area, located in the Panhandle area of the state. This is similar to the effort undertaken in the Colorado endemic area a few months ago. It is estimated that the majority of producers in the area will participate and over 1,000 elk will be euthanized and tested.

The goal of this effort is to remove captive cervids from the endemic area to prevent the spread of the disease to other captive populations.

The University of Nebraska system has announced that they will be closing the Veterinary Diagnostic Lab in North Platte, Nebraska. This is in response to budget cuts from the Nebraska Legislature during a recent special session. This follows the closure of the Scottsbluff Veterinary Diagnostic Lab last year. The only remaining publically operated lab in Nebraska is now located at the main campus in Lincoln.

Tests conducted on one of the three Wisconsin men who died from brain disease confirmed that he died from Pick's disease, a brain disease more common than Creutzfeldt-Jacob. The Centers for Disease Control have obtained brain tissue from the other two men and will be conducting tests to determine cause of death. Results are not expected for another two weeks. These are the men who had eaten venison at a wild game feed and the media frenzy caused a stir among hunters in the Midwest.

The Colorado Division of Wildlife has confirmed that a mule deer killed near Chatfield has tested positive for CWD. This is in the southwestern part of the Denver metro area and is the southern most occurrence in Colorado. According to Dr. Mike Miller the finding was "disappointing but not surprising".

The Minnesota DNR has collected 47 deer from Aitkin County, where CWD was confirmed recently in a captive elk. They have submitted the brain stems to NVSL in Ames for testing. They plan on collecting a minimum of 500 deer from hunters in the vicinity this fall to determine if the disease has jumped from captive to free-ranging animals.

The Georgia Outdoor News magazine is offering a reward of \$1,000 to the first person who provides information to the Turn in Poachers hotline that helps the Law Enforcement Section of the Georgia Department of Natural Resources make an arrest on charges of transporting deer or elk into the state without a permit.

Experiments are underway in Colorado, Wyoming and Iowa to determine if CWD is transmissible to cattle. Preliminary data have shown that it is extremely difficult to infect cattle with CWD. Only a few cattle became ill after having the CWD pathogen injected directly into their brain. Cattle that have lived in close contact with infected deer and ingesting infected deer brain matter have not developed the disease during the first five years of a ten year study. Based on this information and other research, it appears that there is a substantial biological barrier to transmission of CWD from deer to cattle.

The implementation document for the “Plan for Assisting States, Federal Agencies and Tribes in Managing Chronic Wasting Disease in Wild and Captive Cervids” has been submitted to Dr. Bobby Acord, Administrator of APHIS and Dr. Steve Williams, Director of the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service. This document details the efforts needed by States, Tribes and Federal agencies in combating CWD. It assigns specific tasks and indicates budget needs. The document will be posted on the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission web site after it is released by Drs. Acord and Williams.